

Office of the Mayor  
CITY OF NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

# Proclamation

WILLIAM ASHBY DAY  
October 15, 1979

- WHEREAS: William M. Ashby, a distinguished citizen of Newark, today celebrates his 90th birthday, and he and his wife, Mary, recently marked their 65th wedding anniversary; and
- WHEREAS: William M. Ashby has been a tireless servant of his community and a steadfast champion of racial equality, interracial understanding, and social justice; and
- WHEREAS: William M. Ashby was a founder of the Urban League of Essex County and the United Way of Newark, and has been active with the Newark Human Rights Commission, the Newark Senior Citizens Commission and many other organizations; and
- WHEREAS: William M. Ashby was the first Black full-time social worker in New Jersey, and has helped untold numbers of people — particularly the Black, the poor and the elderly — to find a better life in Newark; and
- WHEREAS: William M. Ashby, with the constant support of his wife, continues to devote his considerable energy and wisdom to the betterment of our city, and continues to demonstrate his unwavering faith in our future; and
- WHEREAS: The Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee, of which Mr. Ashby was a founder, is honoring Mr. and Mrs. Ashby at a banquet this evening

NOW, THEREFORE, I, KENNETH A. GIBSON, MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEWARK, NEW JERSEY, do hereby proclaim Monday, October 15, 1979 as

WILLIAM ASHBY DAY

in the City of Newark and call upon all citizens of Newark to tribute to William Ashby and his wife for their long and deep devotion to our community, and to wish years of positive endeavor. I propose Ashby by dedicating ourselves so well: Dignity and our city, and love."

90  
years

# William M. ASHBY a living legend

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

August 7, 1979

To Mr. and Mrs. William Ashby

It is a pleasure for me to congratulate you on your 65th wedding anniversary. I hope that you will enjoy special happiness throughout the year ahead.

Sincerely,

*Jimmy Carter*

Mr. and Mrs. William Ashby  
214 West Market Street  
Newark, New Jersey 07103

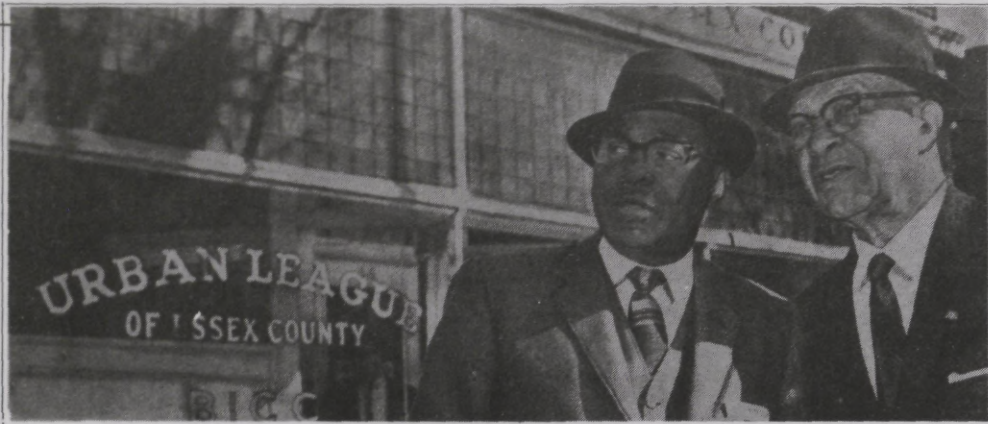
In these four pages INFORMATION proudly salutes William M. Ashby, who marks his 90th birthday on Oct. 15. Since first arriving in Newark in 1911, he has been active in community life. He was the first Black social worker in New Jersey

and the first director of the Urban League of Essex County, founded in 1917. He and his wife, Mary, who recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary, are being honored by the Newark

Preservation and Landmarks Committee at a dinner in Thomm's Restaurant on Oct. 15. Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson has proclaimed a citywide observance of "William Ashby Day."



# Ashby's many years as a fighter for Human Rights...



When the Urban League of Essex County celebrated its 40th birthday in 1967 its first director, William Ashby, joined the then director, James A. Pawley, outside agency's building at 58 Jones St.

## Newark Honors Civil-Rights Veteran

Special to The New York Times

NEWARK, Oct. 31—For William M. Ashby, the first step toward a lifetime commitment to the civil-rights movement came one morning at the turn of the century when he gazed into the face of an acquaintance who was found hanging from a tree after a lynching in his hometown of Newport News, Va.

That commitment, which has spanned more than 60 years, was the subject of a special mayoral proclamation this week declaring a William Ashby Day in Newark. It was also the occasion last night of a cocktail party attended by scores of public officials, community leaders and friends honoring Mr. Ashby on his 85th birthday.

Mr. Ashby's career, beginning in an era when, he said, black leaders measured their achievements in terms of inches granted by a white establishment in America — progressed through

what he views as the greatest era of social change for blacks, in the nineteen-fifties and sixties.

At times that career involved four of the men he views as the key spokesmen for blacks in the nation—the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., A. Philip Randolph, the labor leader; Whitney M. Young of the Urban League, and Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

During an interview today the outspoken Mr. Ashby, a graduate of Lincoln University and Yale University School of Social Work, described the civil-rights movement's current status in America as "almost pusillanimous."

The autobiography, excerpts from which have appeared in the Yale University alumni magazine and in serial form in the now-defunct Newark Evening

News, has been tentatively entitled "Some Unimportant Incidents in the Life of an Unimportant Man Who is 85 and Still Alive."

Mr. Ashby and his wife, Mary—they have been married 60 years—keep active in Newark affairs and he manages to find time for a long daily walk about the city, which he admits being "very chauvinistic about."

Public officials who have known Mr. Ashby over the years say he seems to be even more confident and more plain-spoken now than he did one day more than 10 years ago when he was asked by an interviewer what had been the black people's biggest problem in Newark during the last 50 years.

"Everything is the biggest problem," he replied. "Just being alive and being a Negro is a problem."

In his later years William Ashby has remained outspoken. In 1967, when Dr. Martin Luther King's early opposition to the Vietnam war was questioned by the Newark Evening News, Ashby sent the following letter to the newspaper:

### U.S. 'Magnanimity'

To the Editor:

I take exception to The News' question-begging editorial on "Dr. King's View."

I quote in part, "It is also his privilege to ignore the fact that for every U.S. soldier who fires shot or shell against the enemy, thousands are deployed in missions ministering to the medical and economic needs of the South Vietnamese people."

We invade the people's country. We drop millions of tons of explosives and kill thousands of innocent men, women and children. We burn villages. We make unproductive their rich rice lands. And for all of this we, in our magnanimity, send some packages of aspirin, cartons of vitamins, and loads and loads of canned beef.

Newspapers know that we are wrong. They do not admit it because of a lack of honesty, and they love to be chauvinistic.

Our leaders in high places know that we are wrong. Why else would they keep saying that we will accept any plan from any man anywhere in the world that will bring this killing to an end? They know they've got a tiger by the tail.

One thing and one thing alone prevents us from bringing these senseless hostilities to an immediate end. It is "arrogance." We have convinced ourselves that God has summoned us to Mt. Sinai and thus spoken unto us: "America, of all the nations I have created, I have given only you the power and the gumption to keep My crazy world in a semblance of order."

In every detail Dr. King is perfectly right.

Newark.

William M. Ashby

The above article is reprinted from The New York Times of Nov. 1, 1974.

excerpts from Ashby's forthcoming book . . .

## 'TALES WITHOUT HATE'

### From Chapter 39:

I graduated. What now? In 1911, what does a Negro male, approaching 22, do with a bachelor of arts degree from a Negro college? The avenues open to me were very few and rigidly prescribed. I could get a position as a teacher. That would mean that I had to go into the deep South. I could continue my education and become a minister, lawyer or doctor.

Mama wanted me to become a doctor. I could never get up the courage to tell her pointedly "No." But I always knew that it could never be. I had thought I might become a lawyer, but changed my mind.

The last, the only opportunity of employment left open to me was to go back into a hotel or restaurant as a waiter.

I got a job as a waiter in the catering establishment of W. B. Day and Son on Broad Street, Newark.

I felt a contemptible disgust for myself. I was a disappointment to myself, a disappointment to Mama, a disappointment to lots of people who knew that I ought to do better.

A college degree, and still a waiter. I needed no college degree to be a waiter. I had worked with hundreds of waiters. Some of the best of them could neither read nor write. But with all of my learning, I had not risen one inch above them. I knew that I must do something. What?

One day sauntering along Market Street, I saw a placard in a window. In heavy letters across the top was the name "Eugene V. Debs." It said Debs would speak at the Labor Lyceum on Springfield Avenue. My decision to hear him was immediate. I had read something about Debs, enough to make me believe that I ought to hear.

The man completely captivated me.

I was caught up in his words as he railed against the coal barons, steel barons, ship-owning barons,

Here are some of the events from William M. Ashby's life, told in his own words. These passages appear in his autobiography, which he began writing in his 70s. He originally entitled it "Some Unimportant Incidents in the Life of an Unimportant Man Who Is 80 and Still Alive." Since then he has changed the title to "A Negro Tells One Hundred Tales Without Hate." Portions of the manuscript were published in 1970 in the

railroad barons, for their persecution and exploitation of poor and unorganized working men. This I understood thoroughly.

Debs changed his mood. He spoke of brotherhood. He made a passionate plea for man to serve his fellow man.

"There," I thought, "I will devote my life to the services of my fellow men. I will be a foreign missionary. I will go to Africa and convert all the heathen."

But I still did not know what to do; which way to turn.

### From Chapter 51:

In 1917, I went to New York to the office of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, located at 2307 7th Ave. I conferred with John T. Clark, industrial secretary of the league. The interview went on for quite some time.

I told him of my training in social science at Yale. He rose and left the room. In a little while, he returned and beckoned me to follow him. "I want you to meet Mr. Eugene Kinckle Jones, our executive director," he said.

We went to a room on the second floor. "Mr. Jones, this is Mr. Ashby. I think we might use him somewhere in our program."

Jones recognized me. We had met at a student conference while I was still in school.

Jones remarked that hundreds of thousands of Negroes were pouring into the cities of the North to work in industrial plants, committed to the production of materials for the war. They created a multiplicity of problems which were new, and with which no cities had the knowledge to deal.

The Urban League at that time was the only organization whose purpose and aim might give direction to the solution of some of the problems. Consequently, applications were coming in very rapidly

Newark Sunday News and the Yale Alumni Magazine. The Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee is now seeking a foundation grant to publish the entire 250 pages of recollections as a book for distribution to libraries, schools, community groups and interested individuals. In the following sections Ashby recalls experiences in Newark in the 1910s and '20s.

from various cities, anxious to set up branches of the league.

One of the cities was Newark. Jones said, "I understand that you have lived in Newark. That could be a great advantage to you. I will, therefore, be glad to recommend your name to the board of directors of the Newark organization."

I could hardly contain my satisfaction.

He added that the organization contemplated beginning its activities not later than Sept. 1.

I told him I had a job for the summer. He advised me to report for my job and he would inform me of the decision of the board in Newark.

I had been working at a hotel in upstate New York for perhaps three weeks when I received a letter from Jones, telling me that I had been selected for the Newark post.

### From Chapter 54:

I had been at my job as the executive secretary of the Negro Welfare League of New Jersey — now the Urban League of Essex County — for about four weeks. A telephone call came from Miss Helen B. Pendleton, asking me to come to her office about 11:30 a.m. Miss Pendleton was one of that new group of rebellious white women who were graduating from the colleges in the first decades of the century. All of them more or less had been touched by the great humanitarianism and philosophy of being their "brother's keeper," of which Jane Addams was the symbol and which was so dynamically expressed by Hull House, Chicago.

She became supervisor of case work in the Newark Bureau of Associated Charities.

Miss Pendleton wanted to take me and introduce me to a well-known philanthropist from whom it was hoped I might obtain a sizable donation for the league.

We boarded a trolley car at Central Avenue and



Broad Street and got off at Broad and Market streets. At that time chivalry was not dead. A gentleman raised his hat when approaching a lady. A gentleman arose and gave a lady his seat on the trolley car. A gentleman assisted a lady when stepping off a curb. A gentleman always extended his strong hand to assist a lady getting out of a carriage, or stepping off a trolley car. All this I knew.

But so great was the belief in color superiority, that all over the land there prevailed the conviction that about the flesh of all white women was something sacrosanct and that, if that flesh were touched by a Negro, it would be contaminated.

I did not extend my hand to assist Miss Pendleton as she stepped off the trolley. When we reached the sidewalk, Miss Pendleton stopped suddenly.

Staring menacingly at me, she said, "Mr. Ashby, you are not a gentleman. A gentleman would never permit a lady to step from a trolley without offering his arm to assist her."

Since that moment, I have treated all women with the same deference, no matter what the color of their skin, where they were born, who was their father, whether they weigh 240 pounds, or just 98.

**"There is no one whom I am better than. On the other hand, there never has been in all the billions of people who have lived, who are now alive, and who will yet be born, anyone who is better than I am."**

— William M. Ashby

#### From Chapter 56

Thousands of unattached young women flocked to Newark. They came mainly from rural areas of the South. They were not prepared to meet a single area of large city life. Of even so fundamental a thing as clothing, they were ignorant. They came in the deep of the winter in the thin cotton dresses worn in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama or Florida. If they had a topcoat at all, its texture was so loose the wintry winds of New Jersey whipped through.

But the moral temptations to these girls were the things which give us the most concern. Unlike the white girl, there was no Young Women's Christian Association to give shelter or provide advice. They simply stood out and alone without a buffer of any sort.

Mrs. Richard C. Jenkinson was a member of the executive board of the Negro Welfare League. She was of a family whose roots were deep in New Jersey's history.

I discussed with her the possibility of purchasing a building which would provide a home and also wholesome recreation for at least some of the new young women.

Mrs. Jenkinson said, "I have a friend, a very wealthy friend. If we can interest her, it is very possible that a home for these girls can be purchased. I'll try to arrange an appointment for you."

This friend was Mrs. Felix Fuld. Mrs. Fuld was the wife of Felix Fuld. She was also the sister of Louis Bamberger. Bamberger, Fuld and Mrs. Fuld owned the L. Bamberger Co., one of the largest department stores in the country. Mrs. Fuld had an office on the seventh floor of the building. When her secretary showed me to her office door, I cannot say I was the calmest person in all the world. Luckily for me, she did not pry me with a multitude of questions. In obvious sympathy and sincerity, she said, "I know something about what you came to see me for. My dear friend, Mrs. Jenkinson, has told me something about you. I do not mind telling you that she spoke very highly of you. How much do you expect me to give you?"

From somewhere — I shall never know where — I said "\$500."

She pressed a button. Her secretary appeared at the door.

"Please tell Mr. Fuld to come here."

I do not know why I did not jump up and run out of the place with fright. I had said the wrong thing. I had asked for too much.

Fuld's office was but a few feet down the aisle. He came shortly. First introducing me to her husband, Mrs. Fuld added, "This gentleman wants me to give him \$500."

"Well give him the \$500," he said. He turned and walked out of the room.

The abandon with which he sanctioned the gift simply mystified me. What kind of people were these? This was an enormous sum of money. Yet, Fuld spoke of it with less concern than I would putting a penny in a slot machine to get a stick of gum.

Mrs. Fuld said, "Mr. Ashby, I am so deeply moved by your problem that I will help you raise the money needed. It is time for me to go away for the summer, but I'll postpone that for a week or two."

We set the goal of \$10,000. Mrs. Fuld went out among her friends. I went to industries with which I had worked: Swift and Co.; Armour & Co.; J. H. Ladew; Butterworth and Judson.

In about 10 days or two weeks, we had raised between us in excess of \$8,000.

We purchased a four-story brick building at 58 W. Market Street for \$14,000. The first floor was for the office of the League. The three floors above were the dormitories and reception rooms for young women.

#### From Chapter 76

Newark operated a summer camp for underprivileged children at the seashore. It was called, "Camp Avon by the Sea." The camp was open for six weeks during the summer. The first five weeks were for white children. The last week was for Negroes. That is the way all organizations with camp programs operated.

Randall Worden, director of recreation of the Board of Education, supervised the camp program. Even the tickets given to the children differed in color. I chided Worden about the ridiculousness of such separation, but added that I thoroughly understood the city's reasoning. Those who ran the city were afraid that if the Negro children and the white children were put into the Atlantic Ocean at the same time, the current of the ocean would stop, the water would become stagnant and all the black would wash off the Negro children and stick on the whites, sending them home to their mothers either all black or deep purple.

Worden asked the Urban League to assist in the distribution of the tickets to Negro children in our area.

One morning a group of children, perhaps nine or 10, came into the office. They were from Colden Street. They were nine or 10 years of age.

The leader of the group was a rather dark little boy. "We want tickets to go to camp," he said.

In the group was one white boy. What would I do about him? Often I had met the problem of whites saying to the Negro child, "No, you can't do so and so. No, you can't go such and such a place. You're a colored boy."

Now I must discriminate against a white boy. I must do to him the very thing that I so violently railed being done to me.

Must I tell him the truth? I felt awful — a liar and a coward rolled into one.

I issued the tickets to the Negro children. The little leader, seeing what had happened, said to me, "You didn't give Tony none."

Now, more miserable than ever, I offered some excuse.

"But he's my friend," persisted the boy.

I tried to assure him that I would take care of Tony, that I would make a special trip to the City Hall to get a ticket for him.

"Come on, gang," commanded the little fellow.

When they got to the door, I heard a sudden stop. A voice said, "Wait a minute."

There was a shuffling of feet. The noise grew louder. They had reversed themselves. They were coming back to see me.

The leader stood staring at me for a minute. Then, literally throwing the small piece of cardboard in my teeth, he said, "Here mister, take your ticket. If my friend can't go, I don't want to go."

In my long life, I have read many books, heard many lectures and sermons, seen many plays and heard much high-sounding music; all on the subject of brotherhood.

Of all these, the only one I remember is that which came from the dark lips of that little boy standing before me, his left arm thrown over the shoulder of Tony, saying, "Here, mister, take your ticket. If my friend can't go, I don't want to go."

**"I do not hate anyone. I never use the word in referring to another human being. Does that mean that I love everybody? Certainly not...but I do not hate them. I do not even necessarily avoid them. To hate anyone, one must generate in himself a degree of mental and emotional animosity. Why should I make myself miserable by always being mad at somebody?"**

— William M. Ashby

#### From Chapter 66

I was on the corner of Broad and Market streets. It was 12 o'clock, I went for lunch in a restaurant that was about five or six doors from Broad Street. It was a small place.

I had a salami sandwich, 30 cents; custard pie, 10 cents; a cup of tea, 5 cents.

When the counterwoman gave me the check, it was punched 90 cents. "You made a mistake," I corrected politely. "My food was only 45 cents. You punched 90 cents."

"It's 90 cents for you."

"But," I continued in my remonstrance, "look at the menu there."

"I know what it is on the menu. It's 90 cents for your kind."

As clear as the daylight outside, it came to me what was happening. "Oh," I exclaimed, "now I see."

My color was the justification he needed to up my bill 100 per cent. "All right, let's see you get it," I shouted back.

At the cashier's desk, I put down 45 cents and started out.

"Hey, mister," called the cashier, "come back. You made a mistake. Your check is 90 cents."

My retort was quick and positive. "It is like hell. I had a salami sandwich, pie and tea. Here's my card and my telephone number. Come there and try to collect the rest."

I went into the restaurant rather frequently afterwards. Never again was I overcharged.

#### From Chapter 67

Because of my assignment in the U.S. Employment Service, I was frequently called in to confer with a member of the association, and indeed, to sit in on their executive meetings as they charted their efforts. With many of them, I formed a very cordial relationship.

Of so much value had been their efforts that when the war was over, the War Department awarded them a certificate of merit with warm praise. Dissolution of the committee was natural, since there was nothing left for it to do. But a few persons thought otherwise.

They argued that an organization which had been so effective in war, should now devote itself to peace, and work even harder to get the state back to its peacetime living.

A meeting was called to discuss this point. It was a dinner meeting, held at the Down Town Club, then on the 10th floor of the Kinney Building at Broad and Market streets.

The meeting was presided over by Col. Lewis T. Bryant, who was the commissioner of labor of New Jersey, and also the assistant director of the U.S. Employment Service.

In those days, all after-dinner speakers began in one of the following manners. "Friends, I am reminded of a story they tell about Solomon, the old sheepie" or, "Here's one a friend of mine passed on to me about Tony, the old dago bootblack," or "Did you hear this one about Paddy, the old shanty Irishman?" Or "I must tell you this one about Sam, the old nigger."

Came the time for Felix Fuld to speak. He began by telling a story about an old "darkie" in the South. Really, it was a good joke, not told too well, but I laughed. I laugh freely at any joke if it has humor, no matter at whom it is directed, or about whom it is told.

The meeting was about to adjourn, when I noticed a man some distance from me get to his feet. I recognized him as a manager of the Standard Oil Co. of N.J. He said, "Mr. Chairman, and gentlemen, we have had a wonderful evening and I feel that we have accomplished something. But I think that we ought not to close this meeting before hearing from one young man I see sitting over there. He pestered us a lot, but he always came through when we needed him. I think we ought to have a word from Bill Ashby."

I was shocked. I could not have dreamed that I would be called upon to respond. What would I say?

I told them that as employers, many of them had had the experience of Negroes working in industry for the first time, and that their record on the whole was a good one. I pleaded with them not to retaliate — I had learned many of them planned to get back at Negroes because of the poor performance of some — by firing them and driving them back South by the thousands.

At 8:30 the next morning, just as I entered the door of my office, the telephone rang. My secretary, Miss Estelle Ridley, said "For you, Mr. Ashby."

Mr. Fuld's secretary said, "Mr. Ashby, Mr. Fuld would like to see you today. Can you come?"

"When?"

"It's urgent, can you come right away?"

I started for Bamberger's. All the time I was wondering what I was being called for. Fuld usually gave quite a substantial donation to the work of the league. But his annual donation had been sent just a few months ago. He could not be wanting to make another contribution now.

One other thing, Bamberger's used a full quota of Negroes, men and women, as operators on their elevators, a job opening for which the Urban League had been responsible in the first place. Sometimes when little problems would come up concerning the Negro employees I would be asked to come in and try to settle them. But on such occasions I always talked with Edgar Bamberger, the nephew of Louis Bamberger.

Fuld sat at a large, oval highly polished dark walnut table as I entered the room. He arose, walked around the table, shook my hand, and bade me sit down.

From his left coat pocket, he withdrew a shining gold cigarette case. He offered me a smoke. It was a Turkish brand, Fatima, I think. These were strong. I did not want it, but what else could I do?

Back in his seat, he looked worriedly across the table at me and said, "Mr. Ashby, I want to apologize to you for what I said last night."

"Apologize," I echoed.

"I told a joke which seemed to poke fun at your people," he said. "Please believe me, I meant no harm. I would not insult any man because of his race. Remember, I too come from a people who have known persecution for centuries. I know how deep those jibes can cut. I have slept very little all night. The last thing Mrs. Fuld told me as I left home this morning was to call Mr. Ashby and apologize. Please forgive me."

I knew that never again in my life would I ever be puzzled in the same manner as I was at that moment. Here was I, an insignificant nobody, sitting in the sumptuous office of a man who could command millions, a man who was universally acclaimed as one of the great merchant princes of the nation. And he was apologizing to me.

I know of few examples to match the contrition and humility which came from the soul of Felix Fuld as he leaned across the table that morning and said, "Please forgive me."



Ashby Remains Outspoken

Rights Champion  
Active at 75

William Ashby Was First  
N.J. Negro Social Worker

This article appeared in the Newark Sunday News on Oct. 18, 1964, and was widely distributed by the National Urban League.

By DOUGLAS ELDRIDGE

After half a century of observing and trying to improve the lot of Negroes in Newark, William M. Ashby is as active—and as optimistic—as ever.

Ashby, who turned 75 last Thursday, has probably spent as much time as anyone in Newark in advancing the cause of racial equality. He was the first full time Negro social worker in the state, and he founded and directed the first Urban League offices in Newark and Elizabeth.

Retired for the last 11 years, he still attends several meetings a week as a member and budget chairman of the Newark Human Rights Commission, and as a member of Frontiers International and other groups. He also spends much of his time writing plays and novels about Negro life.

A cheerful, straightforward man, Ashby reminisced yesterday about his own experiences and the changes in the city since he first came here to work as a waiter after his graduation from Lincoln University in 1911. Ashby, one of a dozen children of a grain elevator operator in Virginia, had worked his way through college by waiting on tables in Atlantic City.

After two years in Newark, he went to Yale University and obtained a bachelor's degree in social work. He taught school in Durham, N.C., for a year, and did a study on factory conditions there that attracted the attention of the newly formed National Urban League.

Urban League Bid

While working as a waiter in the Catskills during the summer of 1917, the Urban League invited him to set up its first New Jersey branch—and its sixth in the country—in Newark.

At that time the city's Negro population was barely 15,000. With a few exceptions, Negroes then were confined to the most menial jobs with a few companies, lived in cellars and shacks, and were excluded from hotels and restaurants.

Ashby set up shop as The Negro Welfare League of N.J. in Mulberry Street, but within a year he and others raised enough money to buy a four-story building at 58 W. Market St. for the league's headquarters and a residence for single Negro girls.

In the early days, while also working part time for the old U.S. Office of Negro Economics, he spent much of his time finding housing and jobs for young Negroes who were beginning to flock here from southern farms.

Long before many of today's civil rights leaders were born, Ashby was campaigning against slums, and seeking health, recreational and educational facilities for Newark's Negroes.

"If you think Negroes live badly now, you should have seen it then," Ashby recalled. But even then, he said, there

was remarkably little hostility between races in Newark, and few whites were completely unyielding opponents of any integration.

Retired in 1953

Ashby retired from the local Urban League in 1927 for brief ventures with a loan company and a weekly newspaper, and then became a case worker in the city's welfare division. In 1932 he became director of the Springfield (Ill.) Urban League, and in 1944 set up the Urban League of Eastern Union County in Elizabeth. He retired in 1953.

During the 1920s he was secretary of the Newark NAACP, and in 1960-61 he served on the New Jersey Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. Some of his plays have been produced by amateur groups, and recently he finished the first draft of a novel.

Asked what has been the Negro's biggest problem in Newark during the last 50 years, Ashby promptly replied: "Everything is the biggest problem—just being alive and being a Negro is a problem."

On the other hand, he praised the city's long tradition of racial peace. In his view, it is the result of the number and diversity of jobs Newark has provided to Negroes, and the work of human relations groups.

Opposes Quotas

Ashby is a strong opponent of racial quotas, but he endorses all the tactics of the modern civil rights movement. "Everything they've done is all right with me," he declares. "The business of gradualism is as dead as can be... and that's the way it ought to be."

He says he is unafraid of any white backlash to the Negro drive. "The rough edges are there, but they'll smooth over," he asserts. "Let's get it over with... The whole nation will be happier when we don't have to worry about Negroes any more."

Some conflict is inevitable, he said, but racial problems will ultimately be solved because most people "will want to do the right thing." But much is yet to be done, said Ashby, who noted that this year—after enactment of the civil rights bill—was the first time he felt able to sing the National Anthem with the conviction that this is indeed "the land of the free."

He and his wife, Mrs. Mary Arnold Ashby, a native of Hopewell, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary earlier this year. Their only child, Mrs. Kathryn Durrah, died in 1944 while expecting her first child.

The Ashbys live in a house they have owned for 40 years at 53 Irving St., in the heart of an almost all-white neighborhood. On the Ashby mantelpiece are snapshots of a dozen neighborhood youngsters who have made the Ashby house a second home.

That mantelpiece is one of the best sources of continued optimism for Ashby as he begins his 76th year.



William Ashby and his wife, Mary, posed outside their home at 214 West Market St. as they celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in 1974.

PHOTOS BY ROBERTA CRANE



Mr. and Mrs. William Ashby shared a laugh with Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson at Ashby's 85th birthday party in Thomm's Restaurant in 1974.



William Ashby, second from right in the middle row, was a founder of Yale University chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. Ashby was 25 when picture was taken in 1915.

PHOTO COURTESY NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY